



Photo Source: Ma'an Images

# Gaza in Crisis

## GENERAL OVERVIEW

For thousands of years Gaza has been an important seaport community exporting agricultural produce from southern Palestine. The 1948 War led to the Palestinian refugee crisis, increasing Gaza's population from 130,000 to 300,000 by 1949. Since then, Gaza's population has grown to over 1.5 million. Israel has occupied Gaza since 1967. The Palestinian Authority was established in Gaza in 1993 and a period of outside investment and development followed.

Following the second Palestinian uprising in 2000, Israel began to progressively tighten its pressure on Gaza by sealing its borders, destroying the airport, and severely restricting access to the sea. Israel removed its settlement colonies in 2005, but maintained effective control of Gaza through its control of entry and exit from Gaza, including Gaza's exports and imports. Israel controls Gaza's air space and sea coast and its military can enter at will. Since the 2006 Palestinian Parliamentary elections, Israel and the United States have led a campaign of international sanctions against Hamas and the elected Palestinian government. This campaign increased in June, 2007 when Hamas gained control of Gaza. Since then, Gaza has been all but completely cut off from the outside world.



## GAZA AT A GLANCE

Population: 1.55 Million

Area: 139 miles<sup>2</sup>

Major Language: Arabic

Demographics: 44% of population under age of 14

Poverty: 86% dependent on foreign aid

Income: 70% earn less than \$1.2 per day

Refugees: 68% of population

Unemployment: 44%

Average Age: 17.2 years

Sources: CIA, UN, Oxfam

## THE SIEGE OF GAZA

Beginning in 2006, Israel and the United States initiated a campaign of sanctions against the residents of Gaza in response to the Palestinian Parliamentary elections in which Hamas won a decisive victory. The siege has not eased, even in the aftermath of Israel's three week military attack on Gaza in 2009.

Resources vital to everyday life are prohibited from entering Gaza: building supplies, medical supplies, mechanical parts, fuel, and clothing; even food is restricted. No exports are allowed out of Gaza, crippling the industrial and economic sectors. A tunnel economy has emerged in response.

Adding to the severity of the crisis is the damage inflicted by Israeli air strikes on the

**“Gazans are treated more like animals than human beings”**

- US President Carter

only electrical power plant in Gaza. The resulting electricity deficit has led to an increased dependency on diesel generators -- generators not easily repaired due to the blockade of spare parts. Those that remain in working order lack the diesel fuel needed to operate effectively. Hospitals, water and sewage systems, industrial enterprises, and many households now rely on these unreliable generators, furthering the humanitarian crisis. The blockade has destroyed the economy and the public service infrastructure of Gaza. According to OXFAM, “The current situation in Gaza is man-made, completely avoidable, and, with the necessary political will, can also be reversed.”

## JABALIA REFUGEE CAMP

Few places in the world have a higher human density than the Jabalia refugee camp. Located northeast of Gaza City, Jabalia houses more than 107,000 Palestinians in just half of a square mile. Jabalia is not an urban city where living space can be multiplied by building upwards. It is a tightly packed maze of small cement block shelters with asbestos roofs that were built by the United Nations following the 1948 Arab-Israeli War. Entire extended families live in these two or three room buildings: descendants of those who originally inhabited the camp more than sixty years ago after fleeing their homes during the war.

Life in Jabalia is defined by poverty. More than 80% of its residents live on less than two dollars a day and the UN distribution center has just one staff member for every 5,963 aid recipients. The refugees live without adequate social services, health care, and sanitation; the roads and alleys are filled with waste and pests, and the camp is often flooded during the rainy season, and the drinking water -- when available -- is filled with harmful chemicals and bacteria.

Source: UNRWA

**“Whole neighborhoods were simply razed because four houses in the area served to launch Qassam rockets”**

- an Israeli soldier in Gaza



*Palestinian children attend their first day of class in over a month beside the ruins of their destroyed school in Rafah*

Photo Source: Ma'an Images

## EFFECTS OF THE SIEGE

- Hospitals experience power cuts lasting for 8-12 hours a day. (OXFAM)
- 95% of industrial operations have ceased due to the lack of electricity, production materials, and the ability to export their goods. (OXFAM)
- 25-30% of households do not receive running water. (OXFAM)
- 80% of the water supply falls below World Health Organization standards.
- Nearly half of all children under the age of two have anemia and 70% have Vitamin A deficiency. (UNICEF)
- 80% of 4th to 9th graders are failing academically. (OXFAM)
- More than 80% of Palestinian children in Gaza reported being depressed in a study by the United Nations Development Program.
- Every day, 69 million liters of partially or completely untreated sewage--the equivalent of 28 Olympic-sized swimming pools--are pumped directly into the Mediterranean because it cannot be treated. (Red Cross)
- At least 30% of the arable land in Gaza lies within the buffer zone created when Israel built a wall around the territory. Palestinians are shot at when they attempt to farm this land. (Red Cross)
- In 2007, 18.5% of patients seeking emergency medical treatment outside of Gaza were refused permits to leave by Israel. (OXFAM)

## DECEMBER - JANUARY 2009 MILITARY ASSAULT ON GAZA

On November 5, 2008, Israel attacked and killed six Hamas members, effectively breaking a six-month truce during which rocket attacks into Israel launched from Gaza had all but ceased. Hamas and militant groups in Gaza resumed rocket attacks into Israel, prompting international efforts to reestablish a ceasefire. These efforts ended when Israel began its assault on Gaza "Operation Cast Lead" on December 27, 2008. The Israeli military initiated three weeks of air strikes on Gaza with the stated intent of halting rocket attacks on southern Israel and preventing the smuggling of weapons into Gaza through underground tunnels.

Israel's bombardment of Gaza caused widespread destruction and damage to Gaza's military and civilian infrastructure.<sup>1</sup> Hamas responded by firing rockets into the cities of Beersheba and Ashdod, prompting an Israeli troop re-invasion of Gaza and an increase in air strikes. By January 21, Israeli forces had withdrawn from Gaza, ending the military assault, but maintaining an economic siege and control of Gaza's borders.

Over 1,300 Palestinians in Gaza were killed in the invasion, over 5,000 were injured, and more than 50,000 were left homeless. During this same time, thirteen Israelis were

killed; four by friendly fire.<sup>2</sup> The buildings hit by the Israeli military included 700 factories or places of business, 24 mosques, 31 security compounds, and 10 water or sewage lines.<sup>3</sup> Thirty-four health facilities including eight hospitals were also damaged or destroyed.<sup>4</sup>

The United Nations has charged Israel with using warfare methods contrary to international law.<sup>5</sup> Among the violations are Israel's disproportionate military response, the collective punishment of Gaza's population for the actions of Hamas and other groups launching missile attacks, and the indiscriminate manner in which civilians were killed.

The World Health Organization reported that living conditions in Gaza had deteriorated to the point of being 'intolerable' after the assault. More than 80% of the population were unable to support themselves economically.<sup>6</sup> Compounding the situation, 60% of the agricultural land is no longer fit to produce crops and 400,000 people were left without running water due to the invasion.<sup>7</sup>

Conditions today leave Palestinians in Gaza with little hope or opportunity in life; food and water are scarce and well-paying jobs non-existent.

## U.S. WEAPONS USED BY ISRAEL IN GAZA

### WHAT IS WHITE PHOSPHORUS?

White Phosphorus (WP) is a chemical agent intended for use as a smokescreen. Use of the chemical in civilian areas is illegal under international law. Each artillery shell bursts into 116 smaller wedges that rain down on the target, igniting upon contact with oxygen. Water and fire extinguishers are of no use against the burning chemicals; only complete deprivation of oxygen will stop the fire. Amnesty International reports that the wedges can spread over the area of a football field depending on wind strength at the time of explosion.<sup>8</sup> The material clings to human skin causing third degree burns, organ damage, and possible death.

Human Rights Watch has documented the use of WP by the Israeli army in heavily populated civilian areas during the 2009 assault of Gaza. One Israeli soldier recalls: "In training you learn that white phosphorus is not used, and you're taught that it's not humane. You watch films and see what it does to people who are hit, and you say, 'There, we're doing it too.' That's not what I expected to see. Until that moment I had thought I belonged to the most humane army in the world..."<sup>9</sup>

**The white phosphorus shells used in Gaza were manufactured in the United States by ATK Launch Systems Group in Minnesota.**



*Civilians flee from a WP attack on an UNRWA school in Beit Lahia, Gaza*

### WHAT ARE DIMES?

Dense Inert Metal Explosives (DIME) are experimental military bombs that Israel has been accused of testing during its siege of Gaza. The bombs contain a layer of inert metal—typically tungsten—that creates a rapidly expanding cloud of micro-shrapnel during the explosion. Limbs are easily severed by the shrapnel, and the highly carcinogenic tungsten particles are impossible to remove from the body. Dr. Mads Gilbert of Norway described the effect of the DIME: "The power of the explosion dissipates very quickly and the strength does not travel long, maybe 10 metres, but those humans who are hit by this explosion, this pressure wave, are cut in pieces."<sup>10</sup> DIMES were developed by the United States army.<sup>10</sup>

# HISTORICAL TIMELINE

Egyptian Pharaoh Thutmose III recaptures Gaza from the Hyskos	1484 BCE	A Mediterranean sea-faring peoples, the Phillistines, conquer Gaza and make it the center of their kingdom, Philistia
Gaza incorporated into the Assyrian Empire, followed by periods of Babylonian and Persian control	734 BCE	
Gaza is part of the Roman Empire	27 BCE	Hellenistic era begins when Gaza is besieged and conquered by Alexander the Great
Muslim rule of Gaza begins with the Umayyad dynasty, followed by the Abbassids and Fatimids	637 CE	Gaza is part of the Byzantine Empire
Gaza comes under Ottoman rule and in 1660 Husayn Pasha makes it the capital of Palestine	1517 CE*	Gaza briefly ruled by Christians after the Crusades, then dominated by the Mameluks
Gaza made part of Egypt but is quickly recaptured by the Ottomons	1832 CE	Napoleon takes over Gaza
Following the 1948 Arab-Israeli War, Egyptian forces remain and occupy Gaza	1948 CE	Gaza becomes part of the British Mandate after World War I and the fall of the Ottoman Empire
Israel begins its military occupation of Gaza	1967 CE	Gaza is occupied by Israel during the Sinai Campaign; Israel withdraws after war
The first Intifada begins	1987 CE	Transfer of government power to the Palestinian Authority begins in phases
The second Intifada begins	2000 CE	
Hamas is elected the majority power in Gaza; Foreign aid is cut off, conditions deteriorate	2006 CE	Israel withdraws unilaterally from settlements and military outposts in Gaza
Israel launches its December/January assault; over 1,300 Palestinians and 13 Israelis are killed	2008 CE	Israel blockades Gaza, preventing essential building supplies, medical supplies, food and international aid from entering the territory



Photo Source: Me an images

*Destructive aftermath of an Israeli air strike on Gaza City*

## Footnotes

- 1 Harel, Amos. "Most Hamas bases destroyed in 4 minutes." *Ha'aretz* Dec. 29, 2008. <[www.haaretz.com/hasen/spages/1050432.html](http://www.haaretz.com/hasen/spages/1050432.html)> and "Gaza Crisis: key maps and timeline." BBC News, Jan. 18, 2009. <[http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/middle\\_east/7812290.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/middle_east/7812290.stm)>
- 2 Maqbool, Aleem. "Gaza 'looks like earthquake zone'" BBC News, Jan. 20, 2009. <[http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/middle\\_east/7838618.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/middle_east/7838618.stm)>
- 3 The Associated Press. "UN Chief: Hamas rocket attacks are 'appalling and unacceptable'" *Ha'aretz* Jan. 20, 2009. <[www.haaretz.com/hasen/spages/1057132.html](http://www.haaretz.com/hasen/spages/1057132.html)>
- 4 Protection of Civilians Weekly Report. UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, Jan. 16-20, 2009.
- 5 Statement by Prof. Richard Falk, UN Special Rapporteur for Human Rights in the Occupied Territories, OHCHR Homepage. Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights. 2009 <[www.unhcr.ch/hurricane/hurricane.nsf/view01/F1EC67EF7A498A30C125752D005D17F7?opendocument](http://www.unhcr.ch/hurricane/hurricane.nsf/view01/F1EC67EF7A498A30C125752D005D17F7?opendocument)>
- 6 "Gaza Humanitarian Situation Report." Jan. 2, 2009. UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs. <[www.ochaopt.org/documents/ocha\\_opt\\_gaza\\_situation\\_report\\_2009\\_01\\_02\\_english.pdf#gaza+humanitarian+situation+report&cd=1&hl=en&ct=clnk&gl=us](http://www.ochaopt.org/documents/ocha_opt_gaza_situation_report_2009_01_02_english.pdf#gaza+humanitarian+situation+report&cd=1&hl=en&ct=clnk&gl=us)>
- 7 Maqbool, Aleem. "Gaza 'looks like earthquake zone'" BBC News, Jan. 20, 2009. <[http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/middle\\_east/7838618.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/middle_east/7838618.stm)>
- 8 Amnesty International. "Israel Used White Phosphorus In Gaza Civilian Areas." Jan. 19, 2009. <<http://amnesty.org/en/news-and-updates/news/israeli-armys-use-white-phosphorus-gaza-clear-undeniable-20090119>>
- 9 "Operation 'Cast Lead': 22 Days of Death and Destruction" London: Amnesty International, 2009.
- 10 Cook, Jonathan. "Is Israel Using Experimental Weapons in Gaza?" Counter Punch Jan. 13, 2009. <[www.counterpunch.org/cook01132009.html](http://www.counterpunch.org/cook01132009.html)>



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